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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HELSINKI 000903

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SUBJECT: GYMNICH

Classified By: POLCHIEF GREGORY THOME FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: EU Foreign Ministers held informal consultations in Finland Sept. 1-2, focusing on the Middle East, Iran and Russia. In response to a press report that alleged an EU Presidency call for increased contacts with Hamas, Finnish FM Tuomioja and others made several very strong statements confirming that there will be no changes in the current EU policy of non-contact unless Hamas fulfills the three key demands of the Quartet. The ministers issued no formal conclusions on Iran (in keeping with GYMNICH's informal nature), but announced that High Rep Solana would travel to Tehran "very soon" to seek clarifications on the Iranian regime's response to the P5 1's package of incentives and to tell Iran that it has "very little time" to stop its uranium enrichment program and come to the negotiating table. On Russia, the ministers gave preliminary authorization to the Finnish Presidency to begin laying the groundwork for a new PCA agreement. Formal conclusions on Iran and other issues can be expected during the GAERC Sept. 14-15. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Finland hosted the EU foreign ministers' informal consultations (the "GYMNICH" meetings) Sept. 1-2 in Lappeenranta, 25 km from the Russian border. By limiting the agenda to only three topics -- Iran, the Middle East, and EU-Russia relations -- the Finns hoped to return the GYMNICH to its original purpose: that is, an informal brainstorming session designed to permit ministers to exchange ideas "off the record," without the pressure of adopting formal conclusions. High Rep Javier Solana praised the GOF for achieving this goal, noting that the frank exchange of views that occurred would help the ministers as they seek to find consensus and adopt formal conclusions on these very tough issues at the upcoming General Affairs and External Relations meetings (GAERC) Sept. 14-15. Poloffs from Embassy Helsinki and USMission EU traveled to Lappeenranta to follow the GYMNICH.

Strong Statements on Hamas  
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¶3. (U) At a press conference to open the GYMNICH, Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja made surprisingly strong comments regarding EU policy toward Hamas. Noting that, for the EU, the Roadmap and a two state solution remain the only way forward for lasting regional peace, Tuomioja emphasized that the EU will establish no formal political contacts with Hamas until and unless it fully complies with the international community's three key demands, as laid

out by the Quartet: (1) an unqualified renunciation of terrorism; (2) full disarmament; and (3) recognition of the State of Israel. He added that "the EU must be available to talk to anyone and everyone" who can have an impact on the peace process, but took pains to explain that in the case of Hamas this would only involve -- at most -- informal, low-level exchanges and no change from the formal non-contact policy. Separately, Tuomioja also said that the EU would continue diplomatic contacts with Syria, and that at the August 2 extraordinary GAERC High Rep Solana (along with Spain, Germany, and the Finnish presidency) had been given a clear mandate to communicate to Damascus the EU's expectation that Syria must play a positive role in the regional peace process. In response to a reporter's question, Tuomioja also noted that the idea of sending peacekeepers to Gaza was not on the GYMNICH agenda, but "more pronounced activities" there could not be ruled out if they could positively impact the peace process.

¶4. (C) Tuomioja's surprisingly forceful comments on Hamas came largely as an effort to clarify press accounts (most notably in the Sept. 1 Financial Times) alleging that he had earlier called for the EU to establish contacts with Hamas. In addition to the Finnish FM's public statements, other Finnish officials stressed that in no way was Tuomioja calling for such a shift in EU policy. U/S for Political Affairs Markus Lyra assured Poloff that Tuomioja has always stressed the need for Hamas to change before the EU could consider formal contacts, and that Finland fully supported strong EU pressure on Hamas to accept the Quartet's three conditions. Nothing has changed within the GoF or the EU on the issue, he

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added. Likewise, on the margins of the GYMNICH, Finnish Director General for Africa and the Middle East Aapo Polho carefully explained that while Tuomioja, Solana, and others believe that the EU must talk to "anyone and everyone" who can positively affect the peace process, there is a clear understanding that upgraded relations with Hamas are thoroughly out of the question. The EU will upgrade relations with Hamas when it joins the unity government that President Abbas has suggested, and "we all insist" that Hamas cannot do so until it has fully committed to the three requirements, Polho said.

Iran Has "Very Little Time"

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¶5. (U) On Iran, Tuomioja, Solana and several other ministers expressed deep concerns to the press about Iran's poor response to the P5 1's package of incentives and apparent unwillingness to negotiate. They said that for the EU, diplomacy and negotiation remain the preferred way forward, but they acknowledged that it is now up to Iran to accept that peaceful route, stop enriching uranium, and fulfill the other requirements that will allow negotiations to begin. When pressed by journalists as to why the ministers had not issued forceful statements -- including demands for UN sanctions -- Tuomioja explained that, by its very nature, the GYMNICH was an informal event that did not involve formal conclusions, and as such was "not the time or place to take new decisions" regarding sanctions. However, he explained, High Rep Solana would have "one or at the most two" meetings in the next several days with Iranian nuclear negotiator Larijani. The purpose of these meetings would be not to negotiate or offer the Iranians more time, but to seek clarifications regarding the Iranian response, including conditions for beginning actual negotiations. For his part,

Solana clarified that these meetings would not take long, and that in terms of meeting the P5 1's demands and coming to the negotiating table, Iran had "very little time."

¶6. (C) Privately, members of Solana's staff and Finnish MFA officials said that -- in addition to the informal nature of the GYMNICH -- the ministers did not say more on Iran because they did not wish to preempt UNSYG Kofi Annan's trip to Tehran Sept. 3, or Solana's trip the following week. Solana's spokesperson told PolOff that the Sept. 14 GAERC in Brussels was very likely the "time and place" at which formal conclusions on Iran might be adopted, in light especially of the Iranian response (or lack thereof) to Annan's and Solana's outreach.

Russia

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¶7. (C) The discussions on EU-Russia relations were much more routine, with the GOF briefing the GYMNICH on its efforts to pave the way for launching negotiations aimed at forging a new EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) either late in the Finnish Presidency or early in the German Presidency. While acknowledging that some tough issues needed to be addressed (including "coming to a common understanding on energy policy"), Solana told reporters that Europe's goal is to see Russia "not merely as a problem, but as a partner." He pointed to President Putin's attendance at the EU Informal Heads of State and Government Meeting, which Finland will host in October, as a positive step in that direction and praised Finland's leadership. Separately, Solana's FSU policy advisor Pirkka Tapiola told PolOff that the Ministers focused on the question of how to engage a more confident Russia. Three areas of particular concern included the risks of Putin-style "managed democracy," Russian foreign and security policy including toward Iran, the Middle East, and "frozen conflicts" and energy security.

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